

Phenomenological Reflections on Sleep Resistance in Infants and the Role of Rhythm for Intercorporeality

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Abstract

In this essay, we explore responses to sleep resistance in infants from a phenomenological perspective. After introducing sleep resistance as a plausible reaction to the threat of world-withdrawal, we introduce the concepts of intercorporeality and rhythm. If we understand our existence as being from body to body and rhythm as a way of coordinating bodies, we can think beyond the individual. Philosophers such as Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Derrida help understand on an existential level why sleep resistance can be alleviated through modes of rhythm as displayed in clinging, carrying, and dancing. As a result, parents and infants could come to experience existence as more interconnected, such that going beyond the individual is not to be feared but welcomed. If we learn to habituate such forms of intercorporeality, we will not only sleep better, but come to a more relational understanding of existence.

Keywords: rhythm, intercorporeality, sleep resistance, infant, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas

This essay addresses sleep resistance in infants from a phenomenological perspective. Acknowledging that it is impossible to receive a verbal answer from infants as to why they are resistant to sleep, we propose that the infant's resistance confirms basic phenomenological findings about the extent to which human existence – from the beginning – is directed at world and does not want this directedness to be undercut. The infant does not yet know what we have learned

through repeated experiences: that world connection is re-established after waking up.

In order to show how phenomenological findings can be utilised, we will turn to a crucial structuring element of intercorporeality, namely, rhythm. Rhythm allows for the overcoming of the individualistic tendency in traditional philosophy and shows us how bodies can be organised in relation to each other. Rhythm will then be brought to bear on parenting as such, with a view towards paradigmatic expressions of parental intercorporeality such as carrying and clinging. Recent research in biology has shown that the ‘transport method’ – that is, carrying – is particularly helpful for soothing infants that have sleeping problems (Reuter 2020; Ohmura 2022). We attempt to explore from a phenomenological perspective how a wider concept of rhythm as a structuring element of intercorporeality helps understand such findings from a more holistic and existential perspective.

It will turn out that rhythm as a remedy to sleep resistance is not just relevant for being with infants but can teach us important lessons about our intercorporeal existence, for adults as well. Our emphasis on individuality takes us away from the phenomenological truth that being means being with each other on all levels. Philosophy stresses the emphasis on verbal communication; but with the help of Nietzsche, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, and others, we can come to realise that body language is more pervasive and fundamental. The significance of clinging and carrying as important modes of intercorporeality between infants and parents are mirrored in activities like dance which accompany us through our entire lives, and to which we can become attuned at any stage. If we learn to open ourselves up to the supra-individual foundational level, we might all be able to sleep better.

Introducing Sleep Resistance

Autobiographical description (author name removed):

To me, the resistance to sleep was one of the biggest surprises about being with an infant. I remember experiencing a certain relief or hopefulness when I read in parenting books that newborns sleep roughly 16 hours per day. That sounded like plenty of time for me to sleep, and possibly time for some other things as well. Nobody told me that newborns (at least mine) rarely sleep more than three hours in one stretch, and on average, just an hour and a half. If you have difficulties falling

asleep or falling back to sleep, such short stretches are very unpleasant.

What is more, it turns out that the infant has enormous difficulties falling asleep. True, in some situations they fall asleep like a charm, in a car or pushchair, for example. Some people have claimed that this is because such movements are reminiscent of being unborn and being moved around in a vessel, as it were. Perhaps, but the differences seem to outweigh the similarities, plus, many adults still fall asleep in moving vehicles. The more important point is this: when they are not being carried or moved in a vehicle or drinking milk, it is in my experience nearly impossible to make infants fall asleep.

Why is sleep so difficult? It is almost as if the infant would experience the philosophical dilemma described by Edmund Husserl, namely, that there is something paradoxical and therefore deeply threatening about the interruption of the stream of consciousness: consciousness as such does not sleep, yet conscious living beings need sleep. When Husserl examines sleep in the context of discussing limit problems [*Grenzprobleme*] around birth, death, and sleep, Husserl describes 'falling asleep' [*Einschlafen*] in the following way: "The 'impressions' of the perceptual reality are still there, similar to being immersed in memory or phantasy; but they are removed from me, or rather: I am removed from them [*entrückt*]." (Husserl 2014,12) The experience of my becoming removed is what can induce fear, and since it feels indeed like me becoming increasingly removed from the impressions, not vice versa, it can feel like I could stop the removal and 'hang on'.

Of course, due to the obvious problems accessing what the infant feels, it is difficult to attempt an explanation. What we can be fairly sure about is that the infant does not experience this anxiety before sleep due to some affinity between sleep and death. The infant does not know about death. Yet s/he is already directed at world, fascinated by and at certain moments extremely driven towards world. This uninhibited drivenness is one of the features that make infants so attractive, perhaps due to the contrast it creates to our own tiredness, exhaustion, and difficulty to decide what part of world is actually worth attending to. The infant thus in a sense exemplifies the phenomenological discovery that existence is being-in-the-world, and even more precisely, being-towards-the-world.

Being cut off from this directedness and drivenness is undesirable for the infant and warrants resistance. Furthermore, the infant does not yet know what children and adults know by way of habitualised experiences, namely, that we can reconnect after waking up. As Husserl describes it: “There is a recollection and a synthesis of identity between the present and past world, and in between, a hole [*Loch*] or gap [*Lücke*]” (Husserl 2014, 8). The infant does not know about the possibility of this synthesis after the gap. Moreover, Husserl describes the many dimensions of the removal from world or disconnect which the experience of falling asleep entails: “The ego does nothing of that which it could do, and its ability [*Können*] is no longer ‘alive’ [...]. The unconscious ego is in nirvana; [...] it does not move, does not do anything, does not experience anything, does not see anything, hear anything, act in any way, etc.” (Husserl 2014, 14). Since the infant has only just started to experience the excitements of perception and movement, it is understandable that it would not want this experience to be cut off or be removed from it, especially since it has no awareness that it can reconnect after waking up.

This is all the more threatening because loss of world means loss of myself; the persisting of my ego is “equivalent”, as Husserl puts it, to the persistence of world, that is, the persistence of my experience of world (Husserl 2014, 20). Therefore, Husserl uses the expression of ‘world annihilation’ in this context. Being tired moves me toward sleep, but resisting sleep seems from the perspective of these phenomenological findings quite understandable. In addition, there could be an issue of ambiguity concerning discomforts. A phenomenology of tiredness would yield the result that it is difficult to perceive that sleep would remedy this discomfort. It is sometimes still difficult for us adults to acknowledge that our discomfort and irritability emerge from tiredness; how should the infant know that sleep is what it needs?

For infants, solutions to discomforts tend to come from the outside, mostly from their caretakers. Yet turning outwards for a solution to tiredness might bring about an experience which Emmanuel Levinas describes in relation to insomnia, where world, now stressful due to the tiredness, becomes oppressive and seems to press in on us (Levinas 1987b, 48). It might be the conflict of where to turn in the twilight between facing the oppressive ‘there is’ and that which emits a sense of nothing. This nothing might on some level present itself as

desirable; but can it be trusted if it is as enigmatic as sleep or letting go of world indeed is?

Unfortunately, turning to the carers for help offers no escape from the dilemma, since they stand on the side of world and the 'there is' that needs to be let go of. Carers certainly want to help; but speaking to the infant only pulls him/her back into the world. Language fails to deliver what rhythm can accomplish, as we will see in the next section. Nietzsche expresses very well how language falls short of establishing a deeper connection: "Language, as the organ and symbol of phenomena, cannot at all disclose the innermost essence of music; language can only be in superficial contact with music when it attempts to imitate music" (Nietzsche 1993, VI, 30). Language is a symbol of things in the world, but it cannot connect us to a deeper level where we trust in the deep connections between us and our surroundings.

Is there any solution? On the level of experience, as indicated above, moving the infant by way of carrying them or placing them into a pushchair or car proves helpful. If the surrounding world is in motion as well, the infant becomes part of a larger intercorporeality that alleviates the impossible challenge of not undercutting the connection between individual and world. Intercorporeality is a useful phenomenological concept in this respect because it allows describing the connection from body to body.

Intercorporeality (*intercorporéité*) is a concept introduced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his essay "The Philosopher and his Shadow". Discussing Husserl's phenomenology with emphasis on *Ideas II*, Merleau-Ponty explains that the relation between myself and other people is "neither comparison nor analogy, nor projection or 'introjection'." Building on the idea of double sensations, Merleau-Ponty claims that "I have evidence of the other man's being-there when I shake his hand" because "his hand is substitute for my left hand." Similar to the way in which I recognise my two hands as belonging to one body, I recognise the other's hand as part of a larger intercorporeality: "The other person appears through an extension of that compresence [*übertragene Kompräsenz*; the original *Kompräsenz* concerns the parts of my own body]; he and I are like organs of one single intercorporeality" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 168). While the phenomenologist is aware of the importance of intercorporeality and the way it has always already existed as the foundation of any imagined solipsism, there is an unawareness of these connections in our everyday

attitude because “intercorporeality goes beyond itself and ends up unconscious of itself as intercorporeality” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 173). In this context, Merleau-Ponty also speaks of a “primordial We” (ibid., 175) and explains that the child’s “egocentricity” should be read as something which manifests “both transitivity and confusion of self and other” (ibid., 174). Transitivity designates a way of feeling into the body of the other which later becomes more explicit as empathy.

Thomas Fuchs offers quite a good definition in line with Merleau-Ponty’s overall phenomenology: “Intercorporeality means a prereflective intertwining of lived and living bodies, in which my own is affected by the other’s body as much as his by mine, leading to an embodied communication” (Fuchs 2017, 9). Fuchs also explains how the concept of intercorporeality allows viewing “emotions not as inner mental states that have to be deciphered or inferred from external cues, but as expressive, dynamic forces which affect individuals through bodily resonance and connect them with one another in circular interactions” (Fuchs 2017, 16). This is particularly helpful when it comes to pre-verbal communication between parents and infants. Stern (1998) introduces the concepts of “affective attunement” and “schemes of being-with” to designate how already at the age of just a couple of months, infants learn to respond to their environment in a fashion that is captured much better by the idea of intercorporeality than by any ideas of copying, let alone representation, because intercorporeality names the connection between bodies rather than the separation which would need to be recognised in order for copying or representation to be enacted. In the expanded 1998 edition of his 1985 work, Stern added the dimension of ‘core self-with-another’ to his earlier schemes and became increasingly interested in phenomena of rhythm by attending to ‘vitality’ as that which ties us together (Stern 2010).

The dimension of intercorporeality that will prove most relevant for our theme of sleep resistance concerns dynamic intercorporeality, that is, intercorporeality in motion. When it comes to coordinating a movement between bodies, the concept of rhythm will turn out to be helpful.

Getting into the rhythm

The Ancient Greek concept *rhythmos* designates a measured flow or movement; it derives from *rhein*, flowing. An important guide in thinking about rhythm is philologist and

philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who attributed a crucial role to music. He proclaimed – in a book with this very title – the “birth of tragedy from the spirit of music”, *die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*. What did Nietzsche mean by “the spirit of music”? We do not receive an explicit answer, but it is clear from the book that the spirit of music is or at least involves rhythm. This idea is particularly plausible since Nietzsche inquires into the most primordial form of music in the course of investigating how tragedy amounts to a distinct departure from this origin. When words or lyrics come to determine music, we are already moving away from the most original sense of music as rhythmical. Melody can to some extent be involved in music of the primordial, rhythmical kind; yet the emergence of more sophisticated melodies clearly goes along with the idea of songs, or of adjusting music to lyrics. As Nietzsche puts it: melody gives birth to poetry (Nietzsche 1993, VI, 33).

The move from music to tragedy goes along with and is strengthened by the emergence of philosophy, both of which the Greeks “needed”, according to Nietzsche (1993, I, 3). Rhythm has an immediate appeal, and it is exactly for this reason that Plato, Nietzsche’s arch enemy of sorts, presented the arts as so dangerous. Of course, on closer examination, the picture proves more complex even in Plato; the appeal of the musical can be exploited in support of as well as against the political interests of the state. Overall, Plato reveals the ambiguous side of the arts: creative and revealing, but, due to their special attractive powers, inviting manipulation, distraction, exploitation.¹ This possibility of manipulation and propaganda is what worries Plato. We could describe it by saying that those who exploit these special powers appeal to a level of our existence that is so fundamental that we are addressed in an immediate fashion, eclipsing critical reflection.

To put it in the words of the most committed Platonist in 20th century European philosophy, Emmanuel Levinas: “Rhythm represents a unique situation where we cannot speak of consent, assumption, initiative or freedom, because the subject is caught up and carried away by it” (Levinas 1987a, 4). Levinas quite rightly points out that the idea of rhythm is often invoked yet nonetheless left in the dark. Rhythm is difficult to describe since it operates on a level more primordial than that of subjects and objects which language comfortably and easily captures. Rhythm designates connections, cycles, and

repetitions whereas language involves separation, abstraction, and symbols.

Levinas alerts us to several important characteristics of rhythm. As is clear from the citation at the beginning of the previous paragraph, rhythm plays a special role in relation to our freedom. Rhythm draws us in and carries us away in such a way that we remain passive. It thus takes us back to a dimension more primordial than consent, a dimension in which I am not (yet) a subject. As Levinas puts it, “in rhythm there is no longer a oneself, but rather a sort of passage from oneself to anonymity” (Levinas 1987a, 4). This anonymity places us “among things” in such a way that we do not stand over against them as a subject against objects, but such that we exist as “part of the spectacle” (*ibid.*). Rhythm lets us be part of a whole without us even needing to decide whether we want to be.

Becoming part of a whole without needing to make conscious decisions about it is appealing in several ways. Not only does it provide a dimension of relief from the individuated self that presses on us all too continuously. It also allows us to relate better to others, on the level of intercorporeality. Following the model of dance, rhythm gives us a guide in how to relate to each other, how to be ‘in sync,’ not by means of communication about what should be done, but simply by tuning into rhythm as the shared guide. When it comes to being with an infant, we tend to provide the rhythm – by rocking, bouncing, walking while carrying, and sometimes additionally by humming, singing, and clapping. The infant is usually comforted and tries to join in if at all possible (though for newborn infants, the possibility of joining in only manifests as a change in mood, attending to the rhythm, and perhaps a feeble attempt to move all or part of the body). Being carried is an experience which almost always calms infants down, and we would like to claim that this is due to the comforting rhythm of travelling by way of another body. To be sure, the close contact between the bodies is also crucial; but it is rhythmical movement, even if just through straightforward steps, which has the calming effect.

For adults removed from this basic level, it can be difficult and intimidating to get carried away by rhythm, and here it also turns out that Levinas’s description is not entirely complete: we can resist rhythm. We can behave as if we did not hear it, we can behave as if we are not part of that spectacle and resist being drawn in. For the infant, in contrast, what is intimidating is not rhythm but the opposite thereof: silence,

lack, nothingness. Therefore, rhythm, clinging, and carrying help, as we will now explain more fully.

Offbeat and Clinging: Autobiographical Remarks

The shift from the third to the first person will provide more insight into the particular facets of sleep resistance.² The infancy of the individual will be investigated as a starting point for the investigation into the dynamics of sleep resistance. More precisely, the infancy of a father will be described both in cooperation and challenge with his own infant who resists sleep. When an infant is carried by its caregivers or clings to its carers, it attends to the important moments of rhythmical activity. Particularly, as we think that rhythm adds depth and expression to the infant's clinging, we will construct a dynamic autobiographical narrative that will allow us to reclaim the function of rhythm from the viewpoint of clinging.

The rhythm opens up an infant to affect, a way that an infant's body can relate to movement and thereby relate to other bodily beings. The coordination of infant movement is contingent upon the manifestation of intentions conveyed through the movement of other bodies. Rhythm, in this sense, guides the formation and discovery of intercorporeal life. By highlighting the intercorporeal aspect of rhythm, Thelen demonstrates that "infants often respond to smiles from the observers or from approaches of siblings with the bouts of rhythmical behaviour" (Thelen 1981, 7). Infants perceive rhythmic movements between living bodies as a signal of interaction and care from their caregivers. Trevarthen's experimental studies on infants show that "sensitivity to the rhythm and direction of movement in other individuals is the natural regulator of social life for even very simple animals" (Trevarthen, 2002, 27). The intercorporeal relationship between caregiver and infant hinges on their capacity to enable their rhythms to flow freely within each other.

As a father, my involvement in the birthing process³ prompted me to capture the moments of an infant's unique sensitivity to the rhythm that forms our intercorporeal life. In the delivery room, I fulfilled the role of a companion and supporter for my wife during the childbirth process. Midwives were proactive in helping us during childbirth. They provided us with an exercise ball and encouraged us to move our bodies together. With this ball, I strived, with my wife, to stimulate her long-continued labour, which lasted around three days. She

clung to me in every unpredictable and non-rhythmic birth pang. My bodily becoming became more crystallised as I was dragged mellifluously, with a hug, into the bodily life of my tiny man, who stubbornly resisted being born. Initially, I engaged this ball to soothe my wife's pain, and I have now started utilising it for my sleep-resistant infant to generate the rhythms for his living body at home. Carrying him in my arms, in a rhythmic motion, I bounce with this ball, stand tall with it, bend low with it, and then detach my son from my body to lie securely on his bed while still carrying the last reverberations of our bodies that have just been touching and flowing into each other. His rhythm-sensitive body absorbed the rhythmical movements I performed on the ball, calling him to fall asleep.

On a daily basis, I am reminded of the day in the delivery room when I was holding him on my chest and felt an overwhelming flood of affection. Furthermore, I am reminded of how his tiny body was in touch with my warm body, and I tuned into his breathing as it calmed down into its natural rhythm. This first touch, this bare intercorporeal encounter, is anchored in my body, and it has persistently acquired different phenomenological meanings through the memories stored in my body. Moreover, from an observable distance from my son's sleeping body, I got used to synthesising those unforgettable affective moments with the horizon of current affective moments. Whenever he sleeps, I constantly ponder what this sleeping tiny living body, whose wake-up time is unpredictable, reclaims from his father's living body who is hungry for sleep.

All infants need their caregiver's active bodily engagement in the rhythm world to manage their elemental relation to the world. Despite having rhythm encoded in my body from infancy, as studies of Thelen (1981) and Trevarthen (2002) suggest, why was I unable to retain the rhythm of lived memory of my infant body? As an adult grows older, their body inevitably experiences a decline in both strength and flexibility. Infants can employ their bodies in ways that are relatively diminished in adults. Their remarkable range of movement allows them to achieve feats that adults have no capacity for, including putting their toes in their mouths or flexing their limbs in astonishing ways. According to Iannarilli *et al.* (2013), "individuals's rhythmic abilities decline with age, particularly when faced with increasingly complicated rhythmic patterns." Rhythm needs to utilise our corporeal possibilities. In a sense, it calls for a body that is ready to rock and roll and that is ready to let the music take hold.

In simpler terms, unlocking the power of rhythm requires us to increase the flexibility of our bodies. As a result, an aged body without rhythmic training is unable to efficiently evoke memories from infancy. Therefore, to revitalise my corporeal capabilities, I needed to engage my living body in movement and rhythm with other living bodies to retain my childhood lived body.

My bodily memory has an interesting history of rhythmic ineptitude, as I could not dance according to a precise rhythm before my son was born. I had never danced myself before; therefore, the danceable or the flowable quality of my body was not made explicit to me until I was kicked out of Kurdish Folk Dance (*Halay* also called *Gowend*) one day. This dance is performed with light stepping movements as if counting on the spot while the dancer's hands are connected to each other with their little fingers. In fact, when fingers are interlinked in this way, the dancing bodies can benefit from more space and flexibility. I could not keep up with a traditional dance genre (*Halay*) that could generously accept my ineptitude or offbeats as much as possible. No matter how I strived to keep my steps in time with the other intercorporeal dancing bodies, I could not put my body in explicit relation to them. Indeed, although I had been seized by a musical rhythm at that time, I could not reverberate and extend this rhythm within my body. A kind of worry and embarrassment crept in due to the unmanageable fluidity of my body while I was ebbing away from the dancer's circle, and found myself among the spectators sitting in the front rows. My body had not been received, recognised, or counter-signed since I could not rightly drift into the 'measured flow' or 'rhythm' of other bodies. After being stranded on the island of other bodily spectators, I put my bodily memory into question as my bodily being was made alien to me. How would I be able to reclaim the aptitude of my body which had lost its licence in a dance circle? Borrowing some Merleau-Pontian terminology, 'the non-thematic operative body' with which I was habituated quietly began to thematise my bodily displacement. I was lucky enough to mark and capture my offbeat body rhythm as a significant 'event' which assisted me in rehabitualising my intercorporeal bonds with other bodies. I was awakened, but not in the fullest sense; I had to wait for my son to arrive to wake my habitual bodily possibilities up entirely.

Our habitual or implicit connection to the outside world presupposes the intersubjective constitution as an integral

component, “just like sensorimotor interaction with the objects has become part of our embodied knowledge and perception. Thus, the reality is co-constituted or ‘inter-enacted’ from the birth on” (Fuchs 2020, 65). It is necessary for infants to maintain a constant clinging to the perception of the objects, other subjects, and therefore, the world; this ultimately results in intercorporeal modification. More precisely, the infant often clings to the body of the carer(s), and this relatively persistent desire of a (tiny) human creature to be close to us on the bodily level can be endearing, yet also evokes another substantial change in our world relation. Witnessing an infant’s bodily capabilities evokes memories of the pre-reflective world of the body from the first years of adult life. From their tiny toes to their curious fingertips, every inch of their living body is built to cling to and navigate their surroundings.

The term ‘to cling’ (*Klammern*) incorporates many phenomenological connotations, and it has already disclosed fundamental assumptions regarding perception, affectivity, and intercorporeality. My engagement with phenomenology may not be too different from my engagement with the bodily being of my son. My tiny man awakens in phenomenological wonder to cling to my body while remaining in the realm of the familiar. I cling to his embodied openness to ‘*the things themselves*’, the full, curious eyes looking at faces, his fine ears, which are always tuned to the tender voice of his parents, his persistent endeavours to cling to things in the world which are mostly out of reach. His performance is an immediate response to what he sees, tastes, and hears. I have paid close attention to what my son’s lived body awakened in me. In *Points*, Derrida nicely evokes the double meaning of cling (*klammern*). “*Anklammerung* or *sich anklammern*, *Klammer*, hook, cramp, anchor or clothespin, is also the word for bracket, parenthesis, embrace.” (Derrida 1995, 9) I have clung (*geklammert*) far better to the pathbreaking phenomenological motto ‘*back to things themselves*’, (maybe, suggesting a minor modification, I have embraced ‘*the things themselves*’) when I have understood the Husserlian epoché (*Einklammerung*) in terms of the concept of clinging (*Klammern*). According to Gins, this clinging is of the utmost phenomenological significance. Since clinging “is a proven capability of infants that adults always obviously lose, *the infant’s entire body is in perception mode*” (Gins 2001, 194). Infants approach the world with a maximum grip, and when infants are drawn into a rhythm, their whole body gets the responses they seek from the world.

As a psychoanalyst, Bick dramatically expresses this clinging: “The need for a containing object would show itself in the frantic search for an object, a light, a voice, a smell, or other sensual objects, clinging to the *second skin*/surface in the absence of access to an optimal object, which is the nipple in the mouth, together with the holding and talking and familiar smelling mother” (Bick 2011, 134). The infant clings to the perceptual world surrounding him because there would be no chance of bodily survival without clinging. Clinging to the bodies of others is something an infant must do in order to find contentment inside its own body. According to Irigaray, “the new-born begins with moving its arms, its legs, its hands and its feet, with their respective fingers. It has fun moving its body. And sometimes it is also upset about no longer knowing who or where it is amidst all these movements. *Hence, it needs to grasp something solid: a part of its cradle, the body of the other, a toy and so on.*” [Italics added] (Irigaray 2017, 14). When the newborn is moving his body, he calls out to another being who can motivate and inspire him to have his own original experiences. When we carry an infant or when he clings to us, our body becomes a generative source of experiences and possibilities for it. The infant makes sense of the things when he/she clings to them with rhythm because the rhythm gives the infant's clinging a far more nuanced and expressive quality. There are sometimes tremors as the infant finds its place in the world; however, rhythm helps the infant to find its place in the fabric of the world.

Husserl began with, clung to perception, and he made a passionate and earnest defence of it, as he believes that simplicity of perception might disclose the core of phenomenology. Husserl illuminated the intercorporeal connections between bodies by uncovering and describing perception from an infantile perspective. We follow the traces of infants' bodily movements in our adult bodies and cling to their habits of the world their bodies are gearing into. Therefore, for adults, elemental relations must be unravelled from an infantile point of view to overcome habitualised perceptions of the world. Caregivers will discover that their bodies are also affected by this corporeal process, no matter how hard the infant demands understanding and endless time from his caregivers. The infant needs us for managing their elemental relations, even though we ourselves are struggling to get accustomed to this primordial level of existence. Yet we also gain from this experience. We gain because we are put into

touch with more basic forms of corporeality that are especially relevant to our bodies.

Hold on to time a little longer; I want to go back to my childhood eyes and how my bodily being sensed the rhythmical delights and danced as an onlooker. I was enthusiastic about viewing single or double performances enacted in more interesting outdoor locations. Compared to the *halay or gowend*, performed as a group circle, these performances were more enjoyable for me. The disintegration, dissolution, and liquefaction of the performer's body throughout the performance was much more visible and evoked the affective content of my body intensively. In these performances, the stage is always full of surprises, and you can never tell who will end up on stage. It might be anyone in the audience; there was an air of inter-affective anonymity inhabiting the space between us. Maybe if I worked up the guts to go on to the dance ring, I could easily be one of the performers. There was a compelling intercorporeal negotiation that takes place between the performer's body and the spectator, and it was difficult to tell whether you were among the performers' bodies or the spectators' ones. Dance, in a sense, becomes the site of intertwinement. When spectators watch a dance performance, their body is not just a passive observer but an active and situated participant in this intercorporeal event. The spectator becomes re-embodied by the fluidity of the performer's bodies. Therefore, my body, which was previously acting in the role of spectator, was now acting in the role of spectated. I cannot recall ever being in a location with such a high level of kinaesthetically shared bodily resonances and repercussions. I was aware of being seen and tracked how my body carried this affection of being seen very caringly.

Diyarbakir, where I was born, used to host joyous folkloric performances woven with a traditional dance tune called *Grani*. These performances were powerful and lyrically intense in content. The dancer impersonated the last moments of a sheep taken to the slaughterhouse at a high tempo. The impersonated sheep's emotions were skilfully transformed into movement. The performer empathically and in an emotionally charged fashion conveyed to the audience the stubbornness of the sheep to be taken to the slaughterhouse. The dancer would add some conversational flavours to enhance the tension in the audience. As Brennan states, "when dancers talk during their dances, they do not talk like anyone else. For them, talking does not have the dominant place it does in everyday

conversation. Talking is just another movement, to be performed and balanced with the others[.] Dancing is talking. Talking is dancing” (Brennan 2012, 72). Similarly, Nietzsche refers to how an infant talks/dances/moves only with his body: “Body am I, through and through, and nothing else. [...] Body am I and soul’ – so speaks a child. And why should one not speak like children?” (Nietzsche 2006, 22) When we dance, we connect with the flow of the world around us profoundly and intimately. My tiny man’s fluid body and my body, slowly becoming fluid, established a connection through movement, namely dance. When the river course of my body dries up, I see how his river gurgles freely. I have immediately dug up small waterways within and on my body from all sides so that my tiny man can flow into me.

Going further into my experience as an onlooker, the sheep’s eyes were growing brighter and hyaloid. He trembled, convulsed, and moaned with excessive apprehension of his bitter destiny. Eventually, the impersonated sheep lay on the floor and shook and shivered. A German poet, Franz Binhack, re-articulates my emotions nicely with his beautiful lines: “I put my hands on my heart/And listen! the clock is ticking/And trembles and shakes, I believe/That soon it will stand still”.⁴ What I witnessed, to put it in Derrida’s words, is how a solo performer “can *communicate a movement* or that a tremor, a shock, and displacement of *force*, that is propagated and transmitted” (Derrida 1982, 309). In retrospect, this dance seems to carry constant value in re-enacting my embodied possibilities.

I honed my rhythmic abilities after my baby was born. There has always been an upsurge of energy and rhythm flowing through my body to dance, even though my body has not been moulded yet. One day, my son was watching me folding the laundry; he actually was not in the best of moods. I turned the *Grani* dance tune on and I believe that I improvised the best thing I could ever imagine. I manipulated and varied the dance content into traditional laundry methods that I viewed in my childhood. In the past, the dirty clothes were washed down on the bank of the river by beating, smacking, and rubbing on stones and rocks. Finally, the clothes that were rinsed with running water were wrung out and left to dry. I made everything about laundry errands visible by dancing. I was rhythmically stepping back and stepping forth. I sat down and started to beat and rub the clothes on the coffee table. Then I stood up and stepped back from my son while twisting the

clothes with my hand to wring them out. Then I stepped forward towards my son to hang the clothes on the drying rack. My infant and I engaged in a playful back-and-forth of enthusiasm with each other. I was able to show a constant flow and gurgling going in and on his father's body, and my son was drawn into my dancing body as if he wanted to dive into my arms.

The memory images of this performance, with all its facets, are carried like a wish to communicate to my son, yet with a number of variations. As soon as my son was born, I tried to expand my lullabies and nursery rhyme repertoire significantly. I embarked on the task of furnishing my tiny man's world, which is continually accumulating sensations and excitements from both the inside and outside world through rhythm. And the best way to integrate my son into the rhythm was to make my body the subject of the dance. We can describe it by considering the previous remarks on rhythm: getting into the flow facilitates the fall into sleep. The interest in rhythm is meant to serve the interest of sleep. As Nancy writes, "what leads to sleep has the shape of rhythm, regularity, and repetition. [...] Sleep does compose in itself the rhythm in which its profound nature is reflected. It is a matter of nothing, but mimicry, since sleep itself is regularity, and repetition. [...] Rocking movements put us to sleep because sleep in its essence is itself a rocking, not a stable motionless state" (Nancy 2009, 29-31).

I could not rigorously approach my stranded bodily being if I had not witnessed the sleepless nights of my tiny man. He awakened my bodily rhythm in such a great amplitude and range I can explicitly experience it. When I held my little man in my arms for walking, rocking, swinging, dancing, hushing, and so on, I resolved to watch, and further to keep my whole bodily being close to our rhythmic movement. I discovered that the border between my fluidity and my tiny man's was not drawn rigidly. I have learned to focus my attention on all ebbs, flows, and undercurrents. In the event of a sleep disturbance of my son, I engage my ability to comprehend rhythm better. I will no longer let my embarrassment be so pervasive in my intercorporeal life, as it is becoming more and more obvious that being-with-my tiny man is actually a moving in tune with, floating in tune with, essential to our survival. The rhythm smoothens over the rough spots of the many sites and experiences that the infant is going through at the time of sleep. While the oppressive possibilities of the solid world crush

our bodies, the soothing possibilities of the rhythmical world grow from within our bodies. Thus, sleep dances on us, as Nietzsche reaffirms, “like a delicate wind, unseen, dancing on a panelled sea, light, feather light” (Nietzsche 2006, 223).

We have seen how the problem of sleep resistance in infants calls for phenomenological reflections on human existence. In turn, the findings discussed shed a new light on what it means to be human, especially when it comes to being-with each other. When we sing to each other, dance with each other, tell stories to each other, etc. we teach other what truly counts: being there for each other.

Rhythm has emerged as a crucial mode of coordinating movements and relations between bodies. Rhythm is reassuring to infants because it shows the fundamental connections between humans and allows us to be in sync with one another. We have emphasised the significance of intercorporeality because this concept illustrates how we communicate from body to body on a fundamental level, before the abstractions of language. Crucial modes of rhythmical intercorporeality are clinging and carrying, which correspond to each other. Clinging and carrying are never just physical activities, but engagements from body to body, where body is who we are (and not just what we have). It means to also carry the other’s soul; parents will confirm that bearing the moods of the infant is one of the most difficult tasks. It makes us responsible, and responsive, due to the continuous answerability imposed on us. But if we manage and learn how to carry the other and negotiate carrying and clinging with others, we will have learned some of the most important lessons of life, about the significance of being-with and communication, including body language.

We have also seen in our description that the learning goes both ways. Parents teach the infant about the world and reassure the infant that we can navigate world together if we get into the rhythm. Because world is so attractive, we need to offer an intercorporeal activity to invite sleep together. Because it is not phenomenologically obvious that sleep is the remedy to tiredness, parents need to initiate (and learn to observe and identify the signs of tiredness). We try to show to the infant that it can rely on us, can cling to us for support, and we will be there, along with the entire intercorporeal world, when it wakes up.

In turn, as parents, we also learn. We learn to trust the rhythm of life which is much more cyclical than linear abstractions like timelines make it appear. We come to realise that getting into the rhythm means letting go of some of our individuality, and that this can be a good thing. Sleep is not just scary for the infant, but in more subliminal ways, for adults as well. In addition to the sense that there is a conflict between consciousness and sleep, which for the adult is explicitly reminiscent of death, there is also a resistance to let go of my consciousness and become subject to dreams. Dreams are by and large out of my control and give me a sense of falling into a more communal, archetypal or mythical subconsciousness.

If we learn – infants and parents – that existence means intercorporeality, organised through explicit and implicit rhythms, we can learn that experiencing ourselves as part of a larger whole does not have to be scary, but can bring about relief. If my habit body can turn into habit intercorporeality, I become more mindful of others and their bodily communication. Reversibility in Merleau-Ponty's sense then no longer concerns just my relation to the world, but our intercorporeal relation. We will even arrive at a new sense of 'self' which Judith Butler describes in a fashion that resonates well with the approach proposed here: "The reconsideration of social bonds as based in embodied forms of interdependency gives us a framework for understanding a version of social equality that does not rely on the reproduction of individualism. The individual is not displaced by the collective, but is formed and freighted by social bonds that are defined by their necessity and their ambivalence" (Butler 2021, 147). Ambivalence does not need to threaten us because, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, we have "a genius for ambiguity which might serve to define the human" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 220). With the help of this genius for ambiguity, we could learn to appreciate rather than deny our reliance on social bonds and develop our intercorporeality – and learn to sleep more soundly.

NOTES

¹ See Plato, *Republic*, Book X as well as Staehler 2010.

² First-person accounts of personal experiences connect us with what Metzinger calls *Folk Phenomenology*, a method of comprehending conscious events from an intuitive and pre-scientific standpoint. It prioritises the subjective perception of individuals, with a specific focus on their thoughts,

emotions, and bodily sensations (Metzinger 2005, 58). Of course, we do not intend to adhere strictly to *Folk Phenomenology*. Our position is in agreement with the stance taken by Varela and Shear. They assert that “the third-person perspective in phenomenology should not solely consist of external observation of things but should also constrain and harmonise with the first-person descriptions” (Varela and Shear 1999, 2). In our work, autobiographical remarks are constrained by third-person descriptions while remaining subtly interwoven and harmonious with them. Through our approach, we aim to cultivate a heightened sense of sensitivity towards the phenomenological body of both the father and his infant.

³ Due to COVID 19 pandemic, we were unable to bring in the support of our relatives for this childbirth event, and this allowed me to witness every moment of the birth event. Had I strictly adhered to the cultural norms I have embraced as a Kurdish father, abstaining from involvement in the delivery room, it is conceivable that the observations that inspired me to write this piece would not have occurred.

⁴ Cited from, https://gedichte.xbib.de/Binhack_gedicht_234.+Die+Uhr.htm
“Ich leg aufs Herz die Hände,/Und horch! die Uhr sie geht/Und zittert und bebt, ich glaube,/Daß sie bald stille steht.

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